

TIMES CITY

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Girls lose out on immunity boost

Abantika Ghosh | TNN

New Delhi: Discrimination against the girl child may start in the womb but its extent immediately after birth seems to be no less spine-chilling.

According to figures given in the economic survey of Delhi for 2007-08, the household expenditure on immunisation per child in case of girls is less than half that in case of boys. Both costs though, are way above the national average and Delhi's average cost of immunisation per child — the highest in the country — is more than twice that of Maharashtra, which comes second. In the Capital, the average immunisation expenditure per child in case of boys is Rs 299 while that in case of girls is Rs 129. The national average stands at Rs 41 and Rs 37 respectively. In Maharashtra the figures are Rs 82 and Rs 81 respectively.

The trend is alarming and while officials in the directorate of health services claim that the discrepancy is limited to people from the lower socio-economic strata, doctors across the city have a differ-

ent story to tell.

Says Dr Sanjeev Bagai, director and head of the department of paediatrics, Rockland Hospital: "It is very unfortunate but true. Sixty years after Independence even in the more well-to-do families there is a reluctance to administer the slightly costly vaccines like chicken pox to the girl child for 'personal' reasons. Whereas, in case of a boy there is hardly a second thought given."

The "mandatory" vaccines are BCG (for TB), polio, leprosy, triple antigen (diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, hepatitis B) and MMR (measles, mumps, rubella). The essential vaccines include typhoid and meningitis, while the optional vaccines are pneumonia, influenza, chicken pox, hepatitis A and influenza vaccine. There are also cases when parents opt for the cheaper and often a less effective version of a vaccine if it is a girl child. A case in point is the DPT vaccine which comes in two varieties, standard costing Rs 30 per shot and acellular costing Rs 1,000 per shot. "We see it rou-

tinely that for the girl its the older variety that is preferred," Dr Bagai adds.

Says paediatrician Dr Alok Bhatia: "It is not that rampant in the slightly higher-end setups like Fortis but not completely absent. But the real extent of the problem can be fathomed in the

government setup which is very common that the child is denied vaccination especially if it costs too much. We saw it through our student and resident days and even now on a league encounter it is the same."

abantika.ghosh@timesg

IMMUNE TO CHANGE



Household expenditure on immunisation per child

GIRLS	BOYS
Rs 129	Rs 299

- Cost highest in the country — more than twice that of Maharashtra, which comes second
- While government blames low income groups for discrimination, private hospitals say even well-to-do families neglect girl child
- Often denied vaccination if it is optional
- Cheaper versions of vaccines used for girl child

MARKET RATE OF OPTIONAL VACCINES

Chicken pox (per shot)	Pneumonia (per shot)	
Rs 1,500-1,600	Rs 4,000	
Hepatitis A (per vaccine)	Meningitis (per vaccine)	Influenza (per vaccine)
Rs 1,600	Rs 1,100	Rs 600